

TWO SIDES OF THE AWFUL STORY OF THE OAKES.

By Mrs. Hannah Reed, Who Nursed the Sick and Took the Wheel.

OUR first misfortune occurred when we were seven days out from Hong Kong. This came in the shape of an unusually severe typhoon in the China Sea, which we came out of with a topmast disabled. In the same storm a German vessel went down with all hands. This was on the 11th of last July. Three days later we encountered a second typhoon. These two storms drove us so far out of our course that instead of making for Cape Good Hope and the Atlantic Ocean—the shortest route to New York—we were obliged to take the eastward route by way of Cape Horn. So great was the influence of these storms upon us that when we should have been in the Atlantic, well over our journey, we found ourselves in the Pacific toward Cape Horn.

Head winds, and no winds, delayed us in the Pacific many days. Otherwise all went fairly well till the death of the cook, shortly before we reached the cape. From that time on till we reached port there was nothing but misfortune. Owing to the crippled condition of the crew it was necessary that I should always be ready to assist the captain in any emergency. For four months I slept in my clothes.

When the cook was taken sick I thought it was pneumonia. He had pains in his chest that seemed very severe. I gave him medicine, and he slept that night, but while at breakfast in the morning he became suddenly worse, and died before the mate could get him to his bunk.

There were no more deaths until we had rounded the cape and were in the Atlantic. Then two men and the mate died. Up to this time not many of the men had been sick at once, but now those who took to their bunks began to stay there longer, instead of being down and up, as formerly. Several died, and the captain concluded to make Pernambuco, where men could be shipped in place of those who had died or were too ill to attend to their duties. But everything was against us. We were unable to make Pernambuco, although some of the men say we were within a hundred miles of it. But sailors are not supposed to know how far their ship is from a given port. The captain then concluded to try for the Bermudas. At times the sea was like glass, which was unlucky for us, as it delayed us that much more.

The days and nights of our efforts to make the Bermudas were full of misery for us. We left the bodies of four sailors along that course, and the despondency of the sick men made them worse. The boats were always ready, stocked with water, in case we should be compelled to leave the ship. During 241 days we never saw land. The first vessel we spoke was the Governor Robie, from New York for Melbourne. Mrs. Nichols, the captain's wife, sent me a dozen lemons and a bag of potatoes. None who has not had a similar experience can imagine how good they looked to us. While the potatoes lasted each man in the forecabin was allowed two each day. The men sent back word that they wanted two more.

Our hardest time came after we left the Robie. All the men but three and the cook had taken to their beds. I made gruel for them. For breakfast they had rice and mush, and other light and easily digested food, after the salt meat was gone. None of the sick men was allowed to eat salt meat. The greater part of my time was taken up in nursing them.

The captain has a statement signed by the third mate, and two men, in which they say that, knowing of the complaints of the men, they wished to state that they knew that Able Seaman Anderson had poured coffee grounds into the rice, ruining it, and had then returned to the galley, refusing to eat it. This was done three times inside of a week. There was dry bread and soft bread in plenty. More than once I saw loaves of soft bread floating in the ship's wake.

In making mustard plasters for the men I took care to put them in bags to keep the mustard off their clothes, and sewed strings to them so that they could be fastened about the body. One man sent me word that I didn't know how to make mustard plasters. One sick man we kept in a deck house for five weeks. He went off without a word of thanks. Often on deck the men said very disagreeable things to me. But nothing was out of the question, because after the mate's death there was no one on board able to navigate except the captain.

When the men heard that we were trying to make Bermuda, they became very sick indeed—for fear, apparently, that the captain might change his mind and the ship's course.

This was our situation on the 1st of March, when the captain said that I would have to take the wheel. There was a gale coming. The sail must be taken in, and there were only three men besides the captain who could be depended on at all. I had previously taken the wheel for half an hour or so, but not for a regular turn. It was different now. I put on the captain's ulster and stood at the wheel for hours. It was terrible. It was a frightful gale, and the ship pitched awfully. Next day the captain's reckoning showed that we had been blown away from the Bermudas, so the course was laid toward them again. But, being unable to handle sail properly, we made very little progress. Several times we were blown out of our course. Once we were within 100 miles of the Bermudas, but as the ship was then headed away from the islands the captain concluded to make for New York. From this time on it was necessary for me to be at the wheel a while every day. Meanwhile I gave out all provisions and kept an accurate account of everything used on board. The weather was cold, but there was no fire except in the galley. We had too much to do to keep the ship on her course to attend to personal comfort.

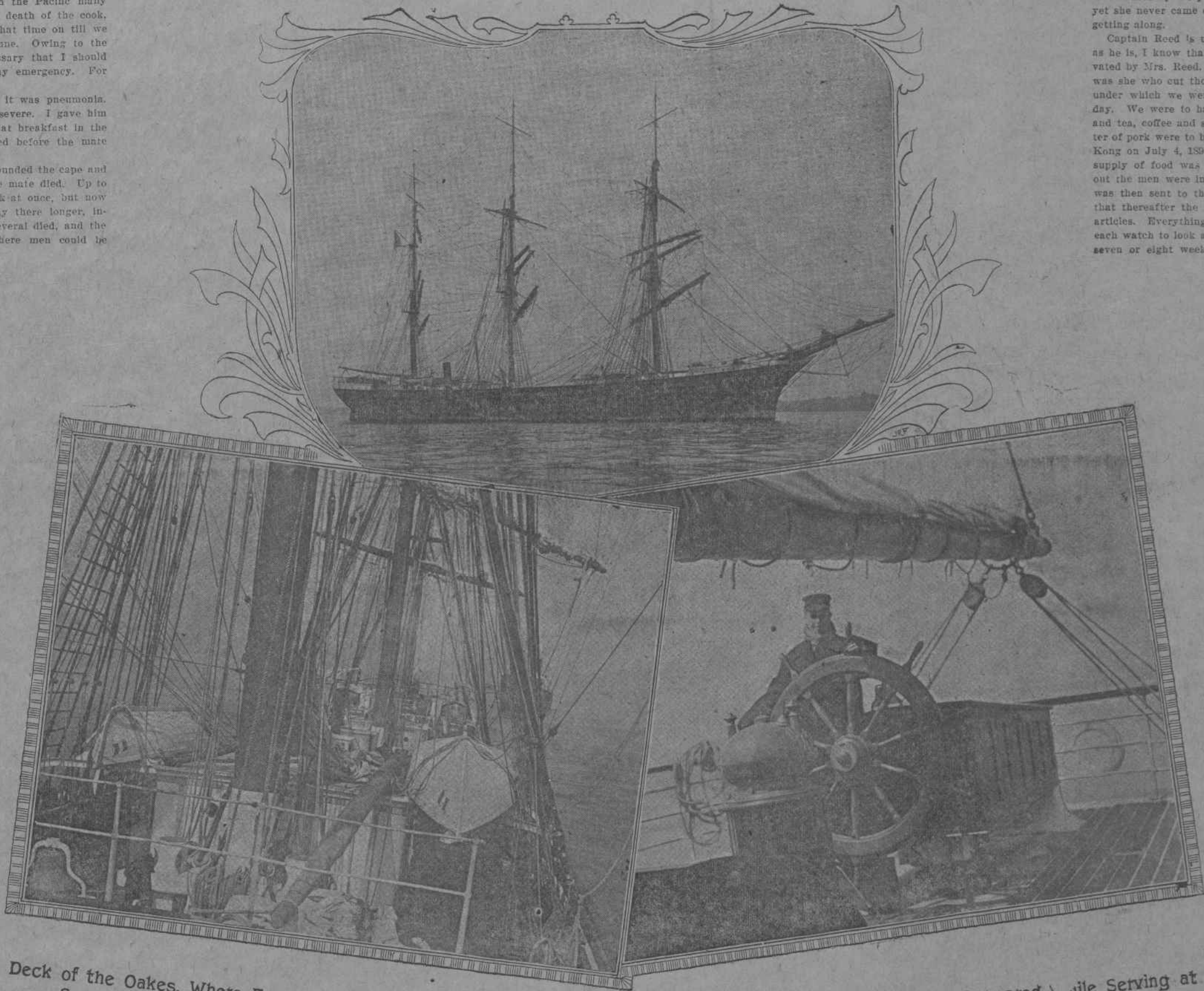
In spite of the length of the voyage, there was at no time any lack of wholesome food. And there was always plenty of pure water. The Government schedule allows each man three quarts of water a day. We gave them over four.

I attribute the illness on board not to bad quality or lack of food on the voyage—as I have already said, food was plenty and

There never came in from the sea a more gruesome story of suffering and wretchedness than arrived one day last week on board the scurvy-afflicted American ship T. F. Oakes. In the annals of modern navigation this tale has no parallel, and the everlasting shame of it is that a ship flying the Stars and Stripes has the tale to tell.

Three centuries ago scurvy was the scourge of the sea. So awful were its ravages that the civilized world rose in its wrath and by stringent measures all but wiped the disease out of existence. Since then it has re-occurred with exceeding rarity, and sailors had ceased to fear it. Now an American ship comes home reeking with the foul disease. Six sailors had died of it, and the rest of the crew presented a spectacle such as had not been seen in a civilized harbor in nearly 300 years.

The Ship on Which a Great Tragedy of the Sea Was Enacted



Deck of the Oakes, Where Four Men and a Woman Worked to Save the Disabled Vessel from Going Down with Its Crew of Sick and Dying.

The Oakes had been at sea for ten months, and on her voyage from China to New York had met with every conceivable disaster except shipwreck that could be caused by wind or waves. Yet it is not from the caprices of the ocean or the opposition of storms that scurvy comes. There is but one cause for it, and that is—culpable neglect. Who, then, is to blame for this horror?

Upon this page you have the two sides of the story, from which you must deduct your own conclusions. The captain's wife, who in the midst of all this suffering had to stand by the wheel and steer the ship for hours at a time, declares that the ship's skipper is blameless. The sailor who suffered says that it was all the skipper's fault. The plague of scurvy would have been averted had the ship put into some South American port when the disease first manifested itself. This, however, the captain says he was unable to do. The men contend that he could have done so had he tried it.

Story of Boatswain Robinson, Who Declares That Mrs. Reed Abused the Crew.

I HAVE followed the sea for seventeen years. During that time I have sailed in all manner of ships, and, naturally, have found some pretty hard usage; but my experience on the Oakes surpasses anything I ever heard of. Captain Reed is a man utterly devoid of humanity, and his wife is a woman such as I never dreamed existed. The newspapers, I see, have made her out a heroine. They pictured her kind and sympathetic, good to the sick, and helpful to those who remained. They have stated that she visited the men who were lying ill and helpless in the forecabin; that she nursed them and cooked special dishes for them. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Reed, during the entire voyage, never once set foot in the men's quarters. Mind you, six poor fellows died at sea, twelve others were prostrated with disease caused by the penuriousness of her husband and herself, and yet she never came even to inquire how the sick and dying were getting along.

Captain Reed is undoubtedly a man without feeling; but, bad as he is, I know that his harsh treatment of the men was aggravated by Mrs. Reed. It was she who gave out the rations, and it was she who cut those rations down. We signed specific articles under which we were to have a certain allowance of food each day. We were to have a pound of bread, a half pound of flour, and tea, coffee and sugar; on alternate days a pound and a quarter of pork were to be given out instead of the beef. We left Hong Kong on July 4, 1896, and the very day we sailed the stipulated supply of food was cut down, until when we were three weeks out the men were in an actual state of starvation. A delegation was then sent to the captain to protest, and the captain agreed that thereafter the food was to be given out as provided by the articles. Everything was weighed, and a man was told off from each watch to look after the weighing on behalf of the men. For seven or eight weeks matters went along like this, and we got what we were entitled to. Then Mrs. Reed announced one day that she would no longer weigh the food, and the captain said we could take it as she gave it to us or leave it, just as we chose.

What were we to do? The master of a vessel is all-powerful at sea. He holds the law in his hands. The sailor man has no choice except to obey orders. If he does otherwise it is mutiny, and no seafaring man wants to rest even under the suspicion of being a mutineer. If he is abused his only remedy lies in making a complaint when he gets into port. The six poor fellows who are now dead are the victims of this condition of things. They were so unfortunate as never to get into port. Those of us who remain had a narrow escape from meeting the fate of the others. If we had been out two weeks longer, or if we had not been picked up by the vessel which towed us in here, I doubt if any one of us would be left.

From the time that the weighing of the provisions ceased we got just about one-half of our regular rations, and no vegetables at all, except mouldy rice, which was unfit to eat. The bread we got was unfit to eat. It was baked on board the vessel and was simply a mass of unseasoned dough. It soured on my stomach and made me deathly sick. Of all the men here in the hospital I am now in the best shape. This is due to the fact that I sailed part of the time as third mate, and got my provisions from the cabin, where a small quantity of beans was given out. The other men received no beans, and the scurvy manifested itself in them on this account much earlier and much more violently.

When some of the men got so bad that their teeth dropped out, Mrs. Reed, after much urging, sent some gruel forward. This gruel, in small quantities, was given out every other day. One man was ludicrous enough to say that he was so sick he would probably not be able to turn out again during the entire voyage. Thereupon Mrs. Reed shut off his supply of gruel entirely, saying she was not going to feed a man who was too lazy to work.

The captain during all this time was harsh and brutal to the men. When men after man reported sick he would come down and curse them for lazy loafers. However, he did not actually lay hands on any one during the entire voyage. His wife had nothing to say to the men either good or bad. It is not true, as has been alleged, that she, too, cursed us. The only man on board to whom she used violent language was Lung Quang, the cook, who afterward died. She used to haul him around, and once or twice, when he attempted to disobey orders in the matter of serving our food, she assaulted him. She instructed the Chinaman to hold our beef and pork so that it remained about half raw, as too much cooking made the meat shrink and look smaller than she intended it should.

During the entire voyage we never once received any lime juice, as provided by law. Now and then we got what purported to be lime juice, but it was so diluted that little or none of its properties were left. We might just as well have been given so much water. Vinegar was unknown, and of potatoes and onions, both of which prevent scurvy, there was not a sign. After a number of the men were taken sick, an appeal was made to Captain Reed to increase the supply of provisions and have the meat properly cooked. The men said they were starving. His answer was: "Starve; I'll do you good."

Something should certainly be done to the captain and his wife. Unless an example is made of them, every sailor man will feel that he is absolutely at the mercy of the master under whom he sails—that he is without protection. We are going to join in making a complaint, and will seek such redress as we are advised can be had. To show that the death and suffering on board ship is caused by starvation among the crew, it is only necessary to look upon the captain and Mrs. Reed. They are both strong and healthy, because they had a plentiful supply of good meat and canned vegetables. They brought over a lot of live fowl, at which they consumed one or two a week. When we came into port four of these fowl were still left.

JOSEPH ROBINSON, Boatswain.

OPINION OF DR. GEORGE W. STONER.

Surgeon in Charge U. S. Marine Hospital.

With the proper amount and variety of food, there seems no good reason why such cases as those on the Oakes should occur.

All the evidence in this case points to the fact that the condition of the men when brought in here was due to lack of proper nourishment.

The fact that the men are improving so rapidly under a change of diet demonstrates clearly what their trouble was due to—poor food.

It has not been determined with chemical accuracy what the missing constituent is, though it has, undoubtedly, a near connection with some of the organic acids—namely, tartaric, acetic, citric, malic and lactic. There are few diseases which can be more completely cured or prevented by judicious hygienic management. The best medicine for scurvy is a vegetable diet, though fresh meat and milk have been found to play an important part in some cases. Salt meat is not a cause of scurvy, except as excluding more nourishing and digestible food. The efficacy of lemon juice as a remedy seems to have been known in 1600, but it was not until 1795 that, by order of the British Admiralty, it was regularly supplied to that navy. Since that time the amount of scurvy has vastly diminished.

Lemon juice, when used, should have 10 per cent of brandy or rum added, to prevent fermentation, and should be packed in jars covered with a layer of oil and sealed. Potatoes form perhaps the best remedy.

BY CAPT. GRAHAM, RETIRED.

I have had scurvy, although in a mild form, and know what it all means. I shipped before the mast when sixteen years old. My second voyage was from Calcutta to Boston, and owing to calms and contrary winds we were out 106 days. After the first hundred days symptoms of scurvy began to appear among the crew, and one after another went to their bunks. After a few days I, too, began to feel queer, and told the captain so. I wanted to go below and take it easy, but the captain would not have it. He declared that I must move about, to keep my joints from stiffening entirely, and gave me light work to do. Of course I was unable to go aloft, but I

managed to do my share.

A month later we fell in with a vessel that supplied us with onions and lime juice and we all recovered.

Scurvy is a very rare disease nowadays, but in those times of which I speak—thirty-seven years ago—it was very common. Its primary cause is the lack of acids and vegetables. In those days we had no canned meats and no tinned vegetables. All we could carry was a few barrels of potatoes, onions and the like. Our water supply was limited, and, in fact, we had none of the conveniences of these days.

Now all that is changed. A ship can carry enough canned vegetables and meat for three hundred days or more. In addition they can carry, and, in fact, do carry, 5,000 gallons of water in a tank, going away with the necessity of distilling salt water.

Then, too, the modern ships are cleaner and have better sanitary arrangements. Scurvy is a terrible disease, nearly as

bad as leprosy. The first symptoms are an irritation of the gums and a stiffening and swelling of the knee joints. This is followed by fever, and then comes the fearful stage of the affliction when the flesh begins to rot. It simply decays, and eventually falls off the bones, death relieving the sufferings in the end.

In its earlier stages, scurvy is easily curable. A good drink of lime juice or some raw potato scraped into vinegar and eaten that way are first-class remedies, and their effect can be felt within twenty-four hours. Another remedy is to bury the victim up to the neck in loose, soft dirt. Earth seems to have a peculiar effect on the flesh, and restores it to its normal condition after a few hours.

Captain Reed, of the Oakes, was my mate when I was skipper many years ago, and I was astonished to hear of his experiences. CAPTAIN T. F. GRAHAM, RETIRED. Sailors' Snug Harbor.

BY CAPT. WARD, RETIRED.

I have been at sea for forty years and have never seen a fully developed case of scurvy. Of course I have heard of cases, as every sailor has, but I would not recognize a victim if I saw one.

The disease is a very rare one nowadays and I do not believe that of all the inmates of Sailors' Snug Harbor (8500 half a dozen have seen a person thus afflicted. CAPTAIN GEORGE WARD, Retired, Sailors' Snug Harbor.